

THE IMAGE OF SOARES DOS REIS' SCULPTURE IN ART HISTORY, ART CRITICISM AND LITERATURE: EPOCHS, MODELS AND REPRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

A hundred thirty years after his dramatic death, António Soares dos Reis (ASR) remains a huge challenge for art history understanding and art criticism interpretation, since he has been seen simultaneously as “a Greek, [...] a realist, [...] a classical, [...] and a naturalist” (Arroyo, 1899: 78).

His major sculpture – *O Desterrado* – being “an existential work” (França, 1966: 454) escapes from the classic orthodox aesthetic analysis, standing apart from the typical sculptural work of late 19th century.

Our hypothesis is that ASR art works like a *Rorschach test*, for the narratives referred to it, instead of unveiling its character, reveal the concepts and beliefs upon which successive art studies have been produced.

No visual images are displayed in this text, since the aim of our study is to detect the mental images associated to the insights and models that art historians and other authors traditionally used to assess ASR’s artistic work.

KEYWORDS

Soares dos Reis | Sculpture | Fin-de-siècle | Art History | Art Criticism

If the power of images is like the power of the weak,
that may be why their desire is correspondingly
strong, to make up for their actual impotence.

(Mitchell, 1996:74)

FOCUSING THE SUBJECT

The artistic work by António Soares dos Reis (ASR) had been noticed, documented, and even criticized almost since the artist's primary achievements, for he was seen as the first gifted pupil of APBA – *Academia Portuense de Belas Artes*¹ – (Macedo, 1945: 15).

After a bright academic career in APBA, and with unanimous agreement by the jury, ASR was sent to Paris in 1867 at the age of 20. Once transposed the usual preliminary exams that gave access to the *École*, he soon began working under the direction of the French classical sculptor François Jouffroy (1806-1882).

There, his academic work became once again notorious², even among his colleagues, who kindly called him "*Voleur des prix*" (Macedo, 1945: 30), a nickname that reflects a friendly ambiance, for his colleague Antonin Mercié (1845-1916), referring to him once had said: "*he is the greatest of us all*" (Macedo, 1943:40), while Augustus Saint-Gaudens, in his *Reminiscences*, often called him "*Heart of Gold*", using Paul Bion's expression (Saint-Gaudens, 1913a: 109).

These remarkable achievements were suddenly interrupted by the rise of political tension between France and Prussia, which soon led to war, compelling ASR to return to Portugal in August 1870, before he could create any truly personal artistic work.

In order to resume his grant, ASR managed to get support to finish his scholarship in Rome, where he was able to create his most personal work: *O Desterrado* (The Exiled).

The marble statue *O Desterrado* was the result of the *rendez-vous* ASR had in Rome with his artistic *alter-*

ego, for it confirmed, but also exceeded, what was supposed to be achieved by APBA's most beloved pupil. On one hand, *Desterrado* proved the gifted artist he was, but on the other showed also how peculiar and odd his art was.

The focus of our scope encompasses an approach based on the following topics:

1. The sculptural work of ASR is almost unclassifiable, for it unifies the main 19th century sculptural tendencies, in a most personal way.
2. The hardly classifiable character of his work, makes difficult to find the right terms and concepts (the right keys) to unveil its meanings, and allows much distortion to take place, thus failing to clarify its nature, and to establish its relevance in Art History.
3. Becoming almost opaque to interpretation, ASR's artistic work acquires a special feature: it works like a "Rorschach test", triggering, absorbing and showing the imaginative apparatus one may subconsciously hold, associated to one's peculiar character.

If our hypothesis proves right, then its primer effect should be helping us to enhance the insights and intuitions – the images – that art historians, art critics, and other authors formed about ASR's art, when trying to establish its relevance and meanings in Art History, while in a second glance, it may foster the formulation of some new perspectives and interpretations, at least updating a new Rorschach test!

In order to achieve that goal, we have analysed the complete literature published on ASR's work and

¹ APBA was established in 1836, by queen D. Maria II, under the decree of 22 November, signed by the Minister of the Kingdom, Manuel da Silva Passos (Santos, 2008: 427).

² ASR academic prizes: 1st prize in the "*concours de place*" (April 1869); honourable mention with a copy (October 1869); Two 3rd prize in life sculpture (1870); one 2nd prize in sketching from natural (1870).

persona, during two distinct periods³, established as follows:

1. Fin-de-siècle ASR's image: from his lifetime biographers and critics until "Arte e Artistas Contemporâneos", by Ribeiro Arthur.
2. Modernity ASR's image: from António Arroyo's monography until ASR's birth centenary celebration.

Using this methodology, we intend to find out which are the most used *clichés* to read ASR artistic work and *persona*, and to explore the links and connections used to make sense between both, in order to interpellate them, in a way somehow similar to W. J. T. Mitchell, when he questions what do images "really" want. (Mitchell, 1996)

Finally, in order to maintain textual coherence, all citations of Portuguese authors will be translated in English.

FIN-DE-SIÈCLE ASR'S WORK IMAGE

Concerning ASR's artistic work reception, the first relevant mention in the press is a critical analysis of the *XI Exposição da Sociedade Promotora das Bellas-Artes em Portugal*, held in 1876, in Lisbon, where the young sculptor's work was much praised by Ramalho Ortigão, a major personality of *Geração de 70*, one of the most important 19th century Portuguese intellectual movements.

The critical reflections that Ramalho Ortigão publishes in the 1876 edition of *Farpas*, is a text with the extension of 18 pages, in which eight pages are solely dedicated to praise ASR's artistic work, although he exhibited there only two pieces. However, before commenting his work, Ramalho Ortigão remarks:

Mr. Soares dos Reis lives entirely outside all official influences, of opinion, of critic, of dominant society. He adopted a kind of art which, as we have already seen, allows him to cultivate himself in the isolation of his workshop. (Ortigão, 1876: 40-41)

The appreciation of Soares dos Reis art begins by praising the sculptor's attitude towards art and society, but soon talking about "O Artista na Infância", Ramalho Ortigão says:

However, because of his life's circumstances, Mr. Soares dos Reis is anti-rhetorical, extra-literary. He couldn't receive his inspiration unless from nature. [...] He picked up the first little boy he found in the street. His admirable model is simply a little

proletarian, a legitimate son of the plebe. (Ortigão, 1876: 44)

Running away from the mere description, Ramalho Ortigão examines the work:

In all this admirable figure of drawing, anatomic correctness, vivid and throbbing truth, there is not a single concession to prejudice or to conventions. The right foot raised from the soil and twisted over, is not comparable to any of the presumed extremities of erudite statuary. (Ortigão, 1876: 45)

The scrupulous analysis of ASR statue goes on along two more pages. From the next one, we cannot resist to the appeal of quoting another passage:

In this figure, everything of a superior and ideal nature is concentrated in the expression of the physiognomy, by which the author incarnated the deep feeling of his privileged soul. That face, animated by the creative force of the artist, laughs with the powerful delight of genius. (Ortigão, 1876: 46)

And finally, it is impossible to ignore the last and most ironic assertion:

This beautiful work expresses a consoling fact: if in Portugal society annuls the artists, Nature does not refuse to create them. (Ortigão, 1876: 46)

³ So that we may discuss enough analytical material, we will limit our survey to the two first periods of bibliographical production on ASR artistic work and *persona*. Such approach enhances the specific dialectical tensions that affect contiguous periods, which is in the end the scope of our study. Of course, we intent to resume this survey beyond these two initial periods.

Written in July, this was indeed a quite inspiring appreciation of ASR artistic work. Besides that, we must be aware that it was a text published in the most relevant and progressive periodic publication in Portugal. ASR kept one exemplar hand noted by him (Queiroga, 2011:55-56), thus confirming the value it had for the very artist.

The image Ramalho Ortigão draws of ASR artistic work and *persona* is indeed a quite sympathetic one, not only because he is depicted with some kind of aura but also because in spite of ASR's age – only 28 years old – he is seen as a mature artist with full control of his skills, and absolutely aware of what he was about to seek in art.

Besides that, Ortigão's text shows us ASR not so much as a genius, but much more as some kind of a hero, the image of the misunderstood artist that turns his back to mundane society, in order to discover and to explore his own most genuine ideas and feelings.

In brief, this text confirms the good reception of ASR work prompt by his nomination as an APBAL "académico de mérito" (*academic of merit*) in the year before, attesting the acknowledgement of his artistic work in Lisbon, while the laudatory tone of Ramalho Ortigão's text anticipated the nomination of ASR's work for a Silver Medal, on the very 11th Exhibition of *Sociedade Promotora das Bellas Artes*, whose Ortigão's appreciation we just referred to.

The next text to be referred is ASR own *Autobiography*. Written in 1879 by himself, it is the answer to a series of questions posed by art historian Joaquim de Vasconcelos, whose context and purpose ASR explained, as follows:

Through our master ... you have asked me a number of questions which I think I have answered with the gibberish that I send now to you, and earnestly hope you apologize me for not serving you as you wished.

Being at the disposal of your Excellency
Your much obliged friend
Antonio Soares dos Reis.

Autobiography is the first primary source that refers to ASR artistic learning and work, covering nearly all the first segment of his production, between the departure to his abroad artistic grant, in 1867, and his ingress in APBAP in October 1881.

However, because ASR's *Autobiography* was published only in 1905, it will not be considered now. Instead, we prefer to analyse *Album Phototypico e Descriptivo das Obras de Soares dos Reis*. Published in 1889, the very same year of his tragic death, *Album Phototypico* is a quite luxury publication, printed in a hand-made Italian paper – produced by the prestigious *Cartiera Binda*, in Milan – displaying drawings and sketches by ASR, reproduced in Vienna (Mendes, 1889: 116). The preface was written by Canon António Alves Mendes da Silva Ribeiro – the same cleric who had proffered, just the year before, the funeral speech of Alexandre Herculano, during the solemn obsequies of his remains translation to Mosteiro dos Jerónimos (Mendes, 1888) – while the biographic text was written by Manuel Rodrigues, and the photographs made by Emílio Biel, being the Album graciously printed by Typographia Occidental, owned by Joaquim da Costa Carregal.

Dedicated to the "the memory of the glorious extinct", this homage by *Centro Artístico Portuense*⁴ displays the first complete compilation of ASR work, while presenting two main texts: the "Artist's Profile" by Canon Alves Mendes, and "Biographic Traces", which is not signed, but was most certainly written by Manoel Maria Rodrigues, as it is referred in the final acknowledgements.

Presented in the Album as an "artist of the word", Canon Alves Mendes' text is a quite rhetorical piece, proffered much in the same way of other funeral speeches gave by him (Mendes, 1888). Written in a highly erudite form, the artist profile by Alves Mendes traces an image of ASR composed by three distinct and intricate myths.

First of all, the mythical image of the alleged non-rhetorical character of ASR's art, although invoked here more as a failure than as a quality, as he says:

⁴ *Centro Artístico Portuense* was an art education association created in 1880 and active until 1893, whose purpose was to endorse artistic creation and learning, and which had ASR as first Director. In order to get more data on this cf Machado (1947) and Moncóvio (2015).

Ramalho Ortigão called Soares dos Reis as an anti-rhetorical and an extra-literary. It is right, it is right. But I did not yet knew anyone, who being so inferior, so deficient in the plastic of thought, or in the art of the word, was so superior, so abundant in plastic models and artistic intuitions. Inventing a perfect shape and warming it with a brilliant idea and a deep feeling, no one did it as he did. (Mendes, 1889: 12)

This non rhetorical character of ASR echoes the text by Ramalho Ortigão, in *Farpas*, as we have already seen. However, while in Ortigão's discourse the analysis was conceived from a sociological point of view, the image displayed there of ASR's persona and work was of someone who had the merit – the lucidity – of resisting, if not refusing, society's mediocrity contamination. In Mendes' view, however, ASR was an intuitive and inspired artist, but he was rude in everything concerning speech, if not thought.

The second mythical image of ASR persona present in Alves Mendes' speech is also a double one: the artistic genius of ASR is followed at the same time by his most suffering persona, and the image of that duality was expressed by Desterrado, as he points out:

Falling from rock to rock, the unfortunate is inexorably over an abyss; is torn body twists itself there in a bed of thorns; his hurt soul measures the fall; cries from there the fortune; closes the eyes as the image of the homeland fades; opens the eyes, and the image of the desert hits him! Is there a more unbearable martyrdom, a more pitiless fate, a more afflictive life? (Mendes, 1889: 13)

This is a quite melodramatic description of ASR work and of *Desterrado*. According to this perspective, ASR was a genial artist, but the price for the genius was pain and despair:

That gentle and melancholic figure seated on a maritime rock; that desolated figure twisted by sad impulses; that tragic figure that crystallizes all his soul in a tear, and let it fall over the waves; is ... himself. (Mendes, 1889: 13)

The third mythical image of Alves Mendes text interpreters ASR artistic genius not so much as an expression of his glory, but instead as the expression of the glory of his epoch:

Because, let us say it openly, strongly, – these marginal works do not crystallize only a true glory, they stamp an epoch, and truly make it become epic. (Mendes, 1889: 23)

According to Alves Mendes, in the end, ASR genial work was the expression of an epoch, for he was victim of his epoch's tragic grandeur, so he says, as if he was speaking the very words of God, at the end of his speech:

Great Dead, you were the victim of your grandeur! You wanted to hide the laurel of genius under the palm of martyrdom. But above this two symbols, another immortal one shines: a crown of glory. And this one, which has secure in the human tribunals, it wouldn't be refused in God's tribunal. You have always confess it, and that confession you wrote it in the final hour. He would sweetly accommodate you, and in a most clement way redeem you: "*I most pardon you, because you loved too much*". (Mendes, 1889: 23)

The other text in *Album Phototypico* is "Biographic Traces", a text that follows the article Manoel Rodrigues had wrote, along several numbers of *Occidente*, between 11th February 1886 and 11th February 1887. Again, we feel the signs of a cult towards ASR:

Soares dos Reis lived only by art and for art, and his modesty was as large as his talent. Educated in the restrict limits of a median bourgeoisie, [...] his future would be doubtless affected by the social withdraw within which his abilities were developed, becoming not a misanthrope, in all the latitude of the word, but an isolated, a quasi-eremite, whose disbelief, and a too pessimist philosophy, had fatally to worsen the natural tendencies of a harsh and exalted genius. (Rodrigues, 1889: 27)

In his aproach, Manoel Rodrigues engages into a deep, meticulous, and serious psychological description of ASR *persona*. His purpose was not to produce any psychological diagnosis but mainly to absolve ASR for his obsessions and exasperations, as he says:

For sure there were in the glorious artist a pronounced tendency for exaggerated exasperation about things of little importance, but one thing that one could not deny was that the background of his bitterness always hid a feeling of honesty and rectitude. [...]

It was necessary to live in the intimacy of the artist's existence, to know him throughout the years in all the phases of his career, to be present at the moments of joy, to comfort him in the afflictive trances of a constant fight, to ear his complaints, to deepen his intentions, to study him, finally, psychologically, in order to understand that strange organization, confuse for many, but clearest for the very few to whom he trusted openly and unconditionally. (Rodrigues, 1889: 28)

In some aspects, ASR's psychic disturbances remind us some of the psychic manias of a younger, but also much gifted, sculptor: Camille Claudel (1864-1943). However, while Camille Claudel's case has already been studied from a multidisciplinary approach, as for example in an Art History and Psychology study (Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tisser, 2014), ASR's case was never studied by such a crossed disciplinary approach, for the only psychological study published on Soares dos Reis was a PhD dissertation by Germano de Souza Vieira, presented to Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de Coimbra, in 1922, and published in 1923, under the title "*Soares dos Reis, a constitutional anxious*".

Published in 1896, Ribeiro Arthur's *Arte e Artistas Contemporâneos* gathers a few texts that had already been published in several newspapers, now presented as profiles of the main fin-de-siècle Portuguese artists, after Silva Porto's return from Paris, and the formation of *Grupo do Leão* artistic movement, in Lisbon.

One of those profiles is about ASR. Written immediately after his suicide, and only ten little pages long, the description and analysis of ASR work and *persona*, condenses and consecrates the same anguished and victimized character of ASR *persona*, and the same genial value of his work, as we quote:

Soares dos Reis was one of the rare artists whose name will be preserved in the years, crowned by the aureole the glory that his contemporaries had surrounded him, and the few but admirable works that he left to us, will always mourn the misfortune which threw him so early into the tomb and broke, against the funereal slabs, his wonderful chisel. (Arthur, 1896:63)

Nothing really new or distinct seems to appear there, and the main effect of Ribeiro Arthur text was trying to establish the traces of *Fin-de-siècle's* cult image of ASR.

MODERNITY ASR'S WORK IMAGE

New images of ASR's artistic work and *persona* displayed by art criticism, art history and/or literature, begin with António Arroyo's, *Soares dos Reis e Teixeira Lopes*, published in 1899.

Although it is controversial to relate Arroyo's book with modernity, this study has the merit of being conceived as a theoretical essay, therefore denoting a research and reflexive conceptual frame, which discards the argumentative basis of a few mere press-type articles, meant to express personal testimonies and points of view.

Our aim here, is not to discuss Arroyo's essay⁵, but instead to find out the terms and the magnitude of the rupture it establishes, with ASR's image by *Fin-de-Siècle* narratives.

As a matter of fact, this essay's intention to establish a sharp rupture with the previous narratives concerning ASR artistic work and *persona*, is clearly expressed by the author, in the Introduction, as follows:

Soares dos Reis, the ill-fated and glorious statuary, and Teixeira Lopes, the fecund and illustrious sculptor whom we all admire, are two figures of indisputable and extremely high value, two consecrated. It seems to me, however, that this consecration, as it is realized, is not based on a clear and right understanding of their works. (Arroyo, 1899: 9)

Further on, and focusing is attention in ASR, Arroyo, says:

I have long since studied the works of these two men, and have tried to explain them to myself. I

⁵ On this matter, see more developments in Pereira (2007) and Barreira (2013).

was moved to this, mainly in relation to Soares dos Reis, for not understanding well how he is judged and admired. His work in general is, as far as I am concerned, not only imperfectly appreciated but, I will say, timorously and ungratefully despised, almost totally; one can only hear talking about *Desterrado* or *Artista na Infância*, his only statues that seem to be known, and still mediocly. (Arroyo, 1899: 9)

These quotes prove the critical intentionality of Arroyo's work, if not the intention of rupture with previous published works, for he confesses his surprise, referring to Centro Artístico Portuense's *Album Phototypico*, as follows:

One can read there: "*Ramalho Ortigão called Soares dos Reis an anti-rhetorical and an extra-literary.*"

But, and it's a curious fact, that impression caused in Portuguese milieu appears us always diverse and dependent from the character, mental education, or profession of those who transmit it. For some, Soares dos Reis is a *Greek*, for others, a *realist*, for most of his sculpture disciples, he was a *classical*, a despot in the application of the laws of the respective *canon*; for those who attended his lessons of stylization, a naturalist, always instilling in the listeners the criterion of the necessity of the study of the living model (Arroyo, 1899: 78).

The most relevant topic of Arroyo's study is that it was conceived according to an aesthetic point of view, something which adds a deductive turn, to what first seemed to remain a classical positivistic inductive approach.

Besides that, and in opposition to previous narratives, Arroyo devaluated the impact of ASR *persona* on his art, arguing that many gifted artists had a suffering soul:

Cases of artists tortured by extreme sensibility are banal; raptures in Beethoven and Wagner were of the same nature of those of Soares dos Reis', and when a rigorous education of manners, as

in Chopin, whom Liszt called prince, blocks the immediate and violent passing of indignation, then that is bad to the artist, because he is hopelessly a premature victim of constraint, as happened to the famous Pole, after his rupture with George Sand. (Arroyo, 1899: 82-83)

According to Arroyo, ASR temperament was that of an "*elegiac*", and *Desterrado's* physiognomy was that of a "*god of desolation*", expressing a "*sweet and resigned sadness*", paralysed by a "*stream of fatality*" (Arroyo, 1899: 83).

Although Arroyo was aware of ASR psychological drama, he did not depict the artist with the traces of the *Hero*, as Ramalho Ortigão did, nor with the colours of the *Martyr*, as Alves Mendes did. Arroyo's image of ASR is more that of a *Desperate*, as the author refuses to establish a direct relationship between aesthetic value and expression of suffering, which is another sign of modernity, even if mitigated.

Arroyo's strategy to unveil ASR artistic work was to find out which were the aesthetic premises of the artist. In order to do so, Arroyo applies in his study two different aesthetic theories: one, in close relation to Richard Wagner⁶ and based in the principle of "aesthetic commotion", and the other based on Eugène Véron's aesthetics.⁷

In spite of this remarkable conceptual frame, the results of its application in Arroyo's essay remain a lot deceiving, when retaining the description and analysis the author presents of ASR's *Desterrado*:

The study of the statue reveals, however, a quite different generating aesthetic commotion. The faces remained absolutely impassive without the characteristic contractions of crying. The mouth has the maximum correction of the fixed indifference of the typical school case, of the *bouche en cœur* in the expressionless position; when viewed from the side and at a glance, may be seen the bitter and concentrated movement, corresponding to the tears swallowed, and not allowed to run in freedom.

⁶ The source is "*Lettre sur la Musique*". A letter that Richard Wagner writes to Frédéric Villot, in 1860, available here: [https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_sur_la_musique_\(Richard_Wagner\)](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_sur_la_musique_(Richard_Wagner)) (2019.05.06).

⁷ The source is Véron, E., 1883, *L'Esthétique*, Paris : C Reinwald, Librairie-Éditeur, whose electronic édition is available here: <https://archive.org/details/lesthtiqu00vron> (2019.05.06).

But that impression fades out quickly. The look is dim, of deep sadness and discouragement, but absolutely calm and sweet. Rigid, frozen, motionless, a childishly banal pseudo-tear is on the right cheek, better it had not been there, at most weakening and contradicting the physiognomic expression that harmonizes itself so well with the modest and dignified haughtiness of its author. We'd better not to see it. (Arroyo, 1899:89)

This description and assessment of *Desterrado* is Arroyo's alternative interpretation, as opposed to the previous most usual ones. This interpretation denotes Arroyo's incapacity to recognize the signs of transcendental suffering, or existential anguish: a feeling that Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) called *angest* (Kierkegaard, 1844). *Angest* (anxiety) is not the same emotion we usually call terror, which is normally felt when a great danger or catastrophe, suddenly appears. *Angest* is a more permanent emotion, for it refers to an existential mood or condition. If it is true that *Desterrado* does not express the national feeling of *saudade*, whose theory would only later be created by Teixeira de Pascoaes⁸, it is not less evident that *Desterrado* expresses no transitory emotion, but a permanent, or at least long-lasting, state of mind.

Stating that his purpose was "*trying to define the artistic profile of the ill-fated sculptor*", Arroyo advances the following aesthetical analysis of *Desterrado*:

The Exiled is, indeed, a beautiful statue, but still without a strong character, in spite of the general nobility of its composition. Influenced by the Greek marbles, by all that world of marvellous forms that, in Paris and in Rome, had most impressed the statuary, it presents in its plastic aspects of a sovereign balance, and besides that of an exquisite modulation and execution. From an expressive point of view, however, it is according to us contradictory. (Arroyo, 1899: 91)

Exploring that alleged contradiction, Arroyo's analysis culminates in a severe conclusion about *Desterrado*'s aesthetical fundamentals, whose sense, in spite of been already appointed as controversial by several authors⁹,

for our purpose is of most relevance, as it displays a quite distinct version of *Desterrado*'s iconography and even of ASR's work:

So, the resultant contradiction would not happen, if the sculptor, instead of choosing to represent a divine image in a Greek heraldic manner [...] he searched the living element, [...] the exiled from world's joys and goods, and before the vision of human real drama, with all its apparent brutality, its complexity and its logical exteriorisation, he drank the germen of esthetical commotion; instead of appealing to the forms of another civilisation, and imitating them, he seek the pathetic of the elements of popular or bourgeois life, directly observed as the single document to consult (Arroyo, 1899: 92-93).

According to Arroyo's point of view, *Desterrado*'s iconography is "*aesthetically false*". Briefly, a beautiful failure. And that happens because this statue was a male nude inspired by Greek marbles.

Arroyo's analysis of *Desterrado*'s aesthetical equation echoes the premodern, rejection of classicism, in which late 19th century art was involved before new aesthetical principles would be stated, against "art for art sake" premises, and beyond the positivist or social oriented artistic tendencies, for example, as an "*expressive composition*", so Matisse postulated, in his 1908 "Notes of a Painter":

Expression, for me, does not reside in passions glowing in a human face or manifested by violent movement. The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive: the place occupied by the figures, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, everything has its share. Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter's command to express his feelings. (Matisse, 1972: 34)

Because of the Cartesian coherence he seeks, and the emotional trend he evokes, *Desterrado*'s aesthetical judgement by Arroyo is quite confusionist.

⁸ The relationship between *Saudosismo* and Soares dos Reis began with the publication of the Conference "*O Espírito Lusitano e o Saudosismo*", proffered by Pascoaes at Ateneu do Porto, on the 23th May 1912. On the book, *Desterrado*'s image appears in its opening (p. 3), under the title "*The Sphinx of the Race*".

⁹ Although the issue here is not to discuss the pertinence of Arroyo's aesthetical study of ASR work, it is imperative to mention some of the authors who have already reflect and talked about the theoretic problems raised by Arroyo's study, such as Pereira (2007), Leandro (2010) or Baldaque and Almeida (1988).

His aesthetic approval of Conde Ferreira statue, seems to prove it:

Given the nature of the subject, which could never be conceived under the consecrated heraldic of the Ancient world, neither by *Renaissance*, then the artist was in the most complete emancipation of forms and laws of the classic style, and only suggested by the wave of goodness and high charitable feelings that came from the Ferreira's legacies to build a thousand of primary schools and a large hospice; then, his so much sensible soul, simple and generous vibrates of deep commotion and puts out that haunt of expression and moral stature, and at the same time of modesty, Soares dos Reis' modesty. (Arroyo, 1899: 96-97)

Hence, aesthetical commotion principles were still based on imitation: the imitation of nature, of costume and physiognomy, with the artist's expressive accent or flavour, conveying style and moral value, framed by the personal modesty of the artist, i.e., by his passivity.

This image of the artistic work, was once again conceived at the service of an external program or discourse. In this case, the positivist program of the cult of the Great Men and Great Deeds that would lead Humanity to his auspicious future: the Positivist State!

In short, this is the opposite of ASR's criticism previous image, for while in the previous cycle the cult object was the artist, who appeared through the image of late-romanticism, described as a suffering martyr or defeated hero, now the object of the cult is not the artist, but the celebrated Great Men or Great Deed to whom Humanity should pay its tribute, by means of the artistic work, becoming the expressive touch added by the artist, the core and/or the essence of what Arroyo called "aesthetical commotion".

Saying this, where can we find the modern turn, in such a narrative? In fact, if one keeps strictly focused in its content, there is no great difference. But if one considers the structure of its argumentation, we have to recognize that in Arroyo's discourse there is a conceptual frame that in Ortigão we cannot find, and we think that such a difference is key, in order to establish a distinction, for the modernity of Arroyo's study lies in its methodology.

During the first decades of 20th century, other nuances were introduced in this critical image of a somehow failed ASR's artistic work, while beautiful and true.

One of the most radical was Manuel Laranjeira's (1877-1912) narrative, himself a suicidal too!

Friend of Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, Manuel Laranjeira was a drastic freethinker, and in article about sculptor Augusto Santo (1869-1904), when referring to ASR, he says:

If one spoke about art, it was certain one had to speak about Soares dos Reis. This name was useful for everything: to prove our value in art, to incense every idiot *parvenu*, and – sad symptom of our critical inferiority – to patronize all the series of errors that anyone would remember vomiting about art.

It is clear that Soares dos Reis passed through Portuguese society misunderstood, like a meteor to the Kaffirs. (Laranjeira, 1901: 72)

Laranjeira was a poet with medical training and a much cultivated person. He could speak five languages, and wrote in many newspapers and magazines. Highly critical, marked by the misfortune of syphilis, Laranjeira wrote in a most harsh tone, and did not spare Portuguese society, with his often sarcastic criticism, saying that "*the name of Soares dos Reis was pronounced as the symbol of an ignored art, [...] dilapidated by the nonsenses of so many judiciousless pedant.*" And he proceeds the discourse in the very same acerbic tone:

His work lays there forgotten, confused in the middle of all that anonym bauble, waiting for the rubble. In this drifting, it's certain that tomorrow his name will be a lost echo, and his work, given the affectionate slouch it receives, will be used to pave the national roads, in order that everyone tramples on it. (Laranjeira, 1901: 73)

So, according to Laranjeira, ASR work was misunderstood and hypocritically applauded, for in the end he was only used to promote Portuguese Art.

Although inflamed by a harsh radicalism, Manuel Laranjeira's perception of ASR artistic work, in terms of art criticism discourse, denotes a rare degree of detachment.

In these terms, one can recognize the intelligence, and the modernity, of his approach. Laranjeira does not even try to "explain" ASR work. He knows it was not the art of the time within which he lived. But at the same time he could perceive that ASR work, although highly historicist in its formal style, was more than just historicist art. Beyond its formal style it had an existential depth, which made it unique and true, as we quote:

Being Art, therefore, the symbol of life, and not of the indefinable of Life, as pseudo-symbolists pretend, logically it shall be derived from the general law of aesthetics: Art, as a Life notion, is evolutionary. (Laranjeira, 1901: 34-35)

The connection Laranjeira establishes here between Art and Life is indeed the sign of the modernity of his thought. Such lucid vision of what modernity is, is even brighter here:

The modern artist have to be educated in the new ideas, he needs to assimilate them, to translate them into sentiment, and then he can rest, aware that he has fulfill his duty, that he has bequeathed to mankind a fruitful work, and never a lyrical and gaseous burp as those by the pretentious, who boggle down in their impotence. [...]

This will be the new Art, the fertile Art, immense as Life is. (Laranjeira, 1901: 35)

Laranjeira, however, was not truly engaged with ASR artistic work. He was much more interested in the work of one of ASR most lucid pupils, who unfortunately died young: Augusto Santo, whose *persona*, as a matter of fact, had much in common with ASR's, when talking about isolation and misanthropy.

In conclusion, Laranjeira's thinking about ASR's artistic work and *persona* can be expressed by an image of "distant acknowledgement". On one hand, he refuses to pay cult to his art. On the other, he refuses "to vomit errors" about it.

The times which were approaching, would not enable the passage to the new artistic paradigm prophesized by Laranjeira.

His disease suddenly became more severe, and plenty aware of his condition, Laranjeira shot himself in 1912, in the very same year Titanic sunk in the Ocean, and just five years later Augusto Santo would die from tuberculosis.

Also in 1912, Teixeira de Pascoaes' Conference in Ateneu do Porto was published by *Renascença Portuguesa*, as we have already seen, and the new and fresh impulse done by Laranjeira, vanishes among the crossed fires of persistent, although fading, symbolism, and fervent, while increasing, nationalism.

About *Desterrado* and ASR, Teixeira de Pascoaes asserted, as we quote:

That statue is sacred; there already lives somehow the religious and metaphysical "Saudade". One feels before its eyes, the divine figure of the Goddess passing through. Soares dos Reis is the precursor of present Poets, the precursor of the truly Lusitanian Art. He is a supreme Figure.

Desterrado is the sphinx of the Race, in the forgotten corner of a forgotten municipal museum. (Pascoaes, 1912: 13).

According to Pascoaes, *Desterrado* was the face of the truly Lusitanian soul, which would recognize *Saudosismo* as the new religion, for a non-Catholic Portuguese Republic.

Against this late symbolistic-masonic perspective, a nationalist anti-liberal and catholic perspective raises. Its mentor is Armando de Mattos. Let us ear him:

Desterrado, in that relaxation of the will that comes off his body through lines of abandon, is for me the most reliable portrait of the Portuguese of the Modern Times, with the virile tenacity of other epochs, which once gave him the courage and the energy to embrace the world in the execution of a sole and conscientious sovereignty, now softened by the bastardization of his own conditions. (Mattos, 1933: 8)

Desterrado is presented here as the image of the modern “degeneracy of the race”, after the grandeur of Portuguese national past.

The final image on ASR work and *persona* comes from Diogo de Macedo (1889-1959), a remarkable sculptor, still related to ASR, as he was his wife’s cousin.

Diogo de Macedo authored two serious and lucid studies on ASR (Macedo, 1943) e (Macedo, 1945), which still remain nowadays essential sources for any study on ASR artistic work and *persona*.

Although too close to ASR, Diogo de Macedo opposed the nationalist anti-liberal appropriation of *Desterrado*’s image, and in a peculiar and most personal way he committed a symbolic suicide, when he resigned to any artistic practice, radically interrupting all his sculptural production, circa 1940.

Diogo de Macedo tried to transmit a conciliatory image on ASR work and *persona*, as follows:

Good, democrat, republican with vague socialist tendencies, idealist and sincere, he sacrificed himself for those who, by instinct of a chosen one to aristocratic emancipations, he escaped from. It was not misbelief, as in Antero, nor despair, as in Camilo, that killed him. It was disappointment only, the collapse of the will, the conscientious incapability of physical resilience that push him, 42 years old, to renounce. (Macedo, 1945: 122)

No other description expresses better our initial hypothesis of the “Rorschach test” effect of ASR work and *persona*. Here, Macedo talks not only about ASR suicide, but mainly about his own renounce.

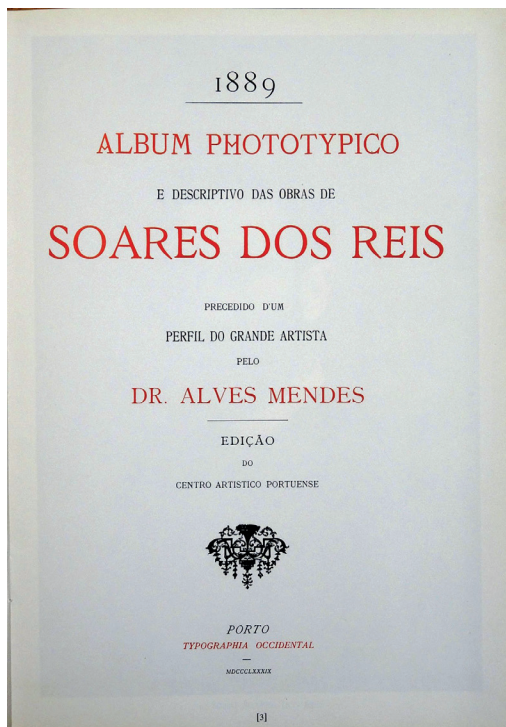


Fig. 01. Phototypic Album of Soares dos Reis, 1889. Source: Affonseiro.



Fig. 02. Teixeira Lopes, Monument to Soares dos Reis, 1904, Bronze, Soares dos Reis’ Garden, Vila Nova de Gaia. Source: author

CONCLUSION

According to our study, ASR was not the genial martyred hero displayed by *fin-de-siècle* narratives, for he was not a romantic figure.

His art was not an “aesthetical failure”, for everyone acknowledged its beauty, nor did his work announce the ontological religion of Lusitanian *Saudade*, for he was not a mystic, nor did his art express modernity’s

Portuguese decadence, for his art was not at all modern.

Was ASR the narcissistic-aristocratic, although sad, hermit Macedo suggests? We do not think so either, because he was truly engaged in promoting art collectively and democratically!

Who was then António Soares dos Reis? Beyond the negative assumptions we now present, the question remains unanswered.

In order to elucidate it, it will be necessary to extend the present inquiry till nowadays.

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